



# Senator Mike Hewitt

## 2005 Legislative Update

Dear Friends,

As I have done in the past, I will be focusing on issues that affect the whole state. I want to find ways to help bolster our state's economy, which in turn helps families find good, decent jobs. In addition, I want to continue to help make Washington a great state to live in, and finally, I want to bring needed water to Eastern Washington.

In this newsletter, I also highlight the election problems in the last governor's race and the key areas we will be working on to ensure this type of election won't happen again.

As your state senator, I represent you and want to hear your comments and suggestions. Please feel free to contact my office in Olympia anytime at (360) 786-7630 or via the toll-free legislative hotline at (800) 562-6000.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Hewitt".

Mike Hewitt

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Senators/Hewitt.htm](http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC/Senators/Hewitt.htm)

### Internet Information:

[www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)

[www.src.wa.gov](http://www.src.wa.gov)

### Committees:

- Labor, Commerce, Research & Development
- Water, Energy, & Environment
- Ways and Means
- Capital Budget, ranking member
- Facilities and Operation
- Rules

### Get the Inside Scoop from Olympia – Sign up today!

Many people ask me every day how they can find out what is happening at the State Capitol. In response, I have started an e-mail newsletter, *The Eastsider's Report*, which provides weekly updates of bills, government information and my perspective on events here at the Capitol. If you are interested, please e-mail me at [hewitt.mike@leg.wa.gov](mailto:hewitt.mike@leg.wa.gov) to subscribe.



*Sen. Hewitt exchanging legislative ideas*

## Correcting election problems

The 2004 governor's race was the closest governor's race in state history. At first, Dino Rossi won by 261 votes. The first recount — a



machine recount — gave Rossi a win by only 49 votes. The second recount — a hand recount — overturned the other two, giving Christine Gregoire the win by 129 votes.

Nearly 2.9 million votes were cast. Vast discrepancies and

utter chaos between the rules and processes of the various auditors' offices require legislative involvement with an election reform package.

Voter confidence must be restored in the election system. With elections that are too close to call, Washington must ensure an accurate vote count.

Legislators and experts have identified several problem areas with Washington's election system. They include:

- Provisional ballots
- Military voters disenfranchised
- King County changing rules in the middle of the election
- Voter confidence

Serious flaws in the current system result in irregularities and no uniform standards across the state. Senate Republicans are committed to fixing these issues to increase voter confidence and to ensure an accurate vote count. More information can be found at [www.src.wa.gov](http://www.src.wa.gov).

## Continuing to focus on helping people find jobs

I am continuing my work to boost the economy so businesses will hire and support family jobs. My focus this year will be:

### Workers' Compensation

Last month, the Department of Labor and Industries raised injured workers' compensation rates for employers and employees. The agency has done this for the last three years — by an average of 29.5 percent in 2003, 9.8 percent in 2004, and

3.7 percent in 2005. The continued rate hikes affect the pocketbooks of business owners and workers alike, threatening current jobs and making the creation of new jobs harder. A new law is needed to make the state's injured workers' compensation system stable, simple and certain. Real, meaningful reform will dramatically reduce delays in delivering payments and allow more time for quality claims management assistance.

### Tort Reform

Frivolous lawsuits and excessive pain and suffering (non-economic damage) awards are costing Washington consumers millions of dollars annually.

People are losing their jobs and companies, especially small firms, are going out of business. Washington malpractice claims in 2001 cost insurers \$44.7 million. This cost is passed on to us. We need to reduce these claims to make insurance more affordable for everyone.

### McWage vs. Starting Wage

Recent news stories have reported that several of the McDonald's stores in the area are outsourcing their drive-up windows. Part of the reason has to do with Oregon's high minimum wage. By outsourcing the person taking the order, the company pays the employee about \$2 less per hour.

Our starting wage is higher than Oregon's — so it could mean we'll soon see both Wendy's and Burger King outsourcing to compete with McDonald's. And, even though McDonald's hasn't let any employees go, it doesn't stop them or their competitors from hiring fewer teenagers. In addition, fast food jobs have historically been the training ground for our workforce as teenagers typically begin with fast food and move up to better paying jobs because of the great experience they receive.

To help keep jobs in Washington, I have reintroduced my starting wage bill that would tie the minimum wage index to the state's unemployment rate. My hope is to keep businesses in Washington, which in turn provide jobs for our citizens.



## Finding water for Eastern Washington

Everyday we take a glass of water from our kitchen sink, and we really don't think about where the water comes from. For cities and the agricultural industry, water is always a hot topic, especially given the dry winter we have experienced throughout the state.

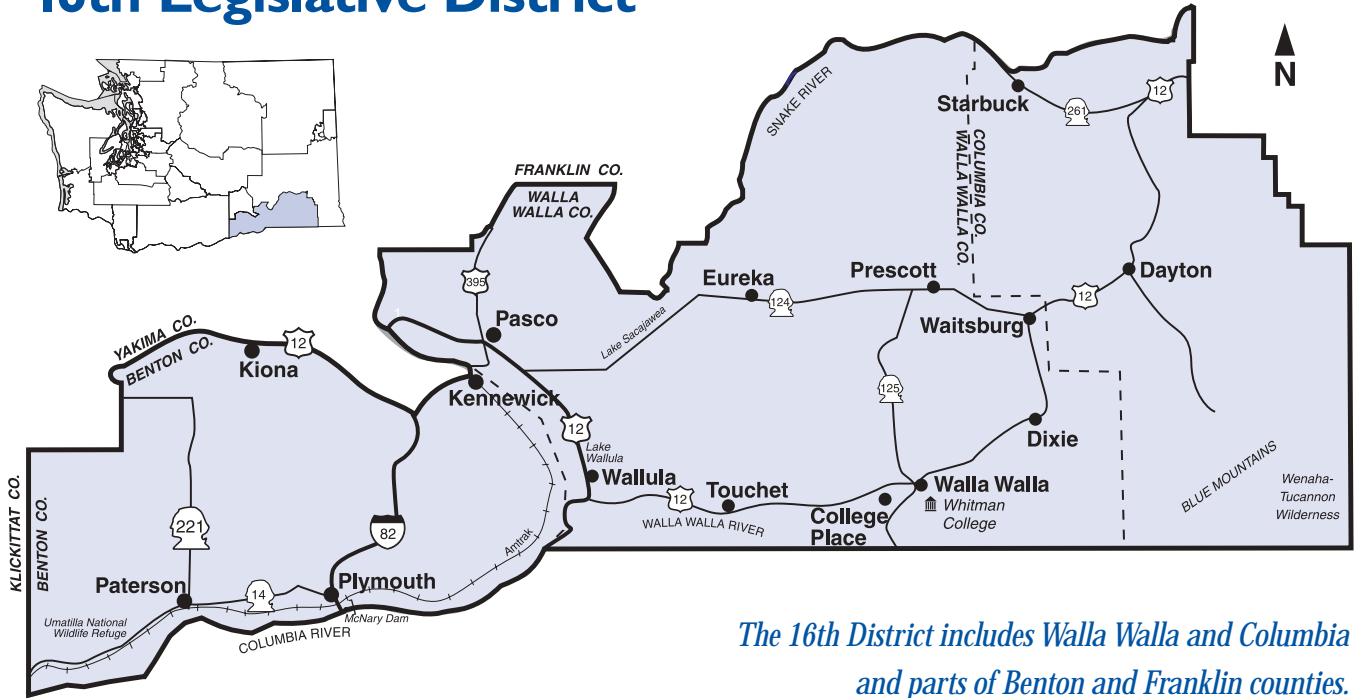
We are losing jobs because water permits for farmlands are never given and businesses that need water wait in a long line of other permit applicants. We need a faster, simpler process for water right transactions. In addition, there must be certainty and flexibility for water right holders. I believe changing to a better water applicant process is critical to the economic vitality of our state.



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# 16th Legislative District



*The 16th District includes Walla Walla and Columbia and parts of Benton and Franklin counties.*

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